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CHRISTIAN LEADER

July / August 2017

In the middle of the mess Page 10

Project SEARCH equips young adults Page 20

Connecting improves impact Page 31

A graphic illustration of four stylized human figures in a circle, holding hands. The figures are colored orange, green, blue, and yellow. The word "Discipleship" is written in a black, cursive font across the center of the circle.

## Discipleship

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July / August 2017

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# Living with elephants

Committing ourselves to a decade of discipleship

As we finished this issue focused on discipleship, I thought about elephants. I recalled the expression, “the elephant in the room,” a phrase often used when we think a topic is important but isn’t getting the attention it deserves. Then there’s the story of the blind men who have never encountered an elephant and learn what the animal is like by touching different parts of the elephant—the thick trunk, a fan-like ear, the hard and smooth tusk or the animal’s very broad side. When the men share their conclusions, they discover they don’t agree on anything about this mysterious animal. In some versions of this ancient parable, the story concludes with the men collaborating to “see” the full elephant.

Last summer U.S. Mennonite Brethren identified three elephants that we are committed to living with and “seeing” together as a community of faith for the next 10 years, and one of these is intentional disciple-making. (For the record, the other two are leadership development and church planting and evangelism.) Regarding discipleship, Jesus commands us to do two things: be his disciples while also making disciples. This means discipleship is both deep and wide—it encompasses a lot of stuff. The feature articles in this issue explore one facet of discipleship that we often call “doing life together.” These articles speak to the value of developing relationships with other believers and those that don’t yet know Jesus as their Savior, specifically connecting with those in our respective congregations, with guests we invite to gather around our dinner tables and with people whose lives can best be described as messy.

Being disciples and making disciples. Neither is done individually. Discipleship is best pursued in collaboration with others. It is not an instant process or an activity pursued in our spare time. Being disciples and making disciples is a 24-7 lifestyle—better yet, a life—choice. In this issue, we invite you to reflect on a very basic question: What does it mean to follow Jesus?

\* \* \*

With this issue, Myra Holmes concludes her 14-year tenure with the *Christian Leader*. For 12 of those years she served as assistant editor and was responsible for writing many of the news stories you’ve read and editing both news briefs and church news departments. Myra has worked diligently, creatively and joyfully. I have appreciated her as a colleague and a friend and will miss her. We wish Myra the best as she enters a new career arena. ▀



Connie Faber  
*has served as editor of Christian Leader since 2004. She and her husband, David, are members of Ebenfeld MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan.*

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## March board meetings continue trajectory

The USMB Board of Faith and Life (USBFL) and Leadership Board (LB) continued to make progress on their respective agendas when the boards met the last week of March at



Island Palms Hotel and Marina in San Diego, Calif.

The USBFL tackled three issues during their meeting, March 29-30. Discussions focused on resourcing pastors and congregations in race relations and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) issues. SBFL is working with Terry Hunt, North Carolina District Conference minister, and Don Davis, executive director of The Urban Ministry Institute (TUMI), to develop resources on race relations, including a new brochure in the BFL Pamphlet Series. With regard to ministry to LGBTQ persons, USBFL continued discussing how best to provide pastors with resources that maintain strong biblical conclusions regarding human sexuality while offering compassion to individuals. Questions regarding the current USBFL policy on credentialing women for pastoral ministry have come to USBFL, and during the March meeting they continued working on ways to engage the constituency in a conversation about that.

The LB, meeting March 30-31, continued implementing the three USMB core commitments—church planting and evangelism, intentional disciple-making and developing leaders—endorsed by delegates to the July 2016 National Convention.

“We’re just getting started,” says board chair Marv Schellenberg in an interview after the meeting. Schellenberg lists three areas in which progress has already been made in 2017: working with C2C Network and MB

Mission in church planting; revamping the USMB website, including the addition of a National Youth Committee website; and implementing the National Strategy Team, a group assigned to do key strategic planning.

To read a full report of the LB and BLF meetings, visit [www.usmb.org/CLNews](http://www.usmb.org/CLNews). —CL

## NST discusses diversity

The ethnic diversity of the U.S. Mennonite Brethren family and how leaders can work toward more inclusivity and unity was the focus of the National Strategy Team (NST) meeting April 1. At that meeting, the NST, established as part of the new USMB vision and strategy to provide key strategic planning, implemented the format they anticipate following in their future meetings. The NST currently consists of the five district ministers, the MB Foundation president and CEO, the MB Mission general

director and the USMB national director. At their first meeting, held in December 2016, the NST decided to focus each meeting on a specific topic and to invite additional leaders and resource people with expertise in that area to help brainstorm and devise new strategies.

To enhance their discussion about serving an ethnic diverse constituency, three people were invited to participate in the NST meeting: Boris Borisov, a church planter from Spokane, Wash., who is also a city planner; Delilah Isaak, who serves in MB churches in Sanger and Dinuba, Calif.; and pastor Daniel Rodriguez of Omaha, Neb. The conversation covered a variety of topics and provided helpful insight as the NST works to move forward the USMB vision for ministry, says Don Morris, USMB national director. To read a full report, visit [www.usmb.org/CLNews](http://www.usmb.org/CLNews). The next NST meeting in late August is a one-day summit to which about two dozen people have been invited to explore new strategies for leadership development. —USMB

## USMB unveils new branding



USMB has rolled out a new logo and tagline that reflect the ministry vision and strategy affirmed at the National Convention in 2016. The new vision statement emphasizes three core commitments—church multiplication and evangelism, intentional disciple-making and leadership development—as well as networking to help each congregation reach full ministry potential. That vision is summed up in the new tagline: Increasing impact together. Don Morris, USMB national director, and Lori Taylor, USMB webmaster, worked with Friesen Design, Enid, Okla., to develop the new branding. —USMB

## Holmes resigns from CL staff



Myra Holmes, *Christian Leader* assistant editor, has resigned from her 14-year ministry with the magazine, effective June 15. Holmes had a long history with the USMB magazine, beginning with a CL internship while she was a Tabor College student. She was an occasional freelance writer in the early 1990s and began taking regular CL news story assignments in 2003. In 2005 she joined the CL staff as the assistant editor. Holmes also served as the USMB social media coordinator from 2011 to 2016. —USMB

## USMB contracts with BELAY; Miller ends assignment

USMB has contracted with BELAY, a Christian organization that provides virtual support in administrative tasks, copywriting and web support services, to provide a virtual assistant in social media. Virtual assistant Heather Smith, of Huntsville, Ala., began working May 12 with USMB.

Prior to partnering with BELAY, USMB contracted with Kolby Miller of Draper, Utah, to promote USMB through social media and email marketing. Miller began work Oct. 24, 2016, on a part-time basis. Miller and USMB mutually agreed to terminate that arrangement in the middle of January 2017. —USMB

## LEAD One focuses on racial reconciliation

Racial reconciliation was the focus of a USMB LEAD One held May 6 in Lenoir, NC. About 35 pastors and leaders from churches in the North Carolina District Conference (NCDC) and the community attended “Overcoming Racism in the Church and Community” at The Life Center, a USMB congregation in Lenoir. Similar events on the theme of racial reconciliation will take place in October in the Southern District Conference, in November in the Central District Conference and in early December in the Pacific District Conference. MB Mission, the global mission agency of North American Mennonite Brethren, is partnering with USMB to host the 2017 series on racial reconciliation. LEAD One events are one-day, high-impact leadership training events. —CL

## Registration opens for Celebrate 2017

Registration is open for the second national gathering of empty nesters, boomers and builders hosted by MB Foundation (MBF). Celebrate 2017 will be held Sept. 29–Oct. 1 in Denver, Colo.

The registration fee has been reduced dramatically to \$199 per person. This is a 20 percent reduction to the Celebrate 2015 fee and is a direct re-



sponse to feedback received to keep the event affordable to all. “We are really glad to be able to reduce the registration fee while maintaining the excellent programming achieved with the first event. This wouldn’t be possible without ministry partners like Southern District Conference, Tabor College and a number of donors who

understand the importance of ministering to this segment of our church family. It is also a testimony to the commitment of our board and staff to this landmark gathering,” says Jon C. Wiebe, president and CEO of MBF.

The theme for Celebrate 2017 is “Anchoring Our Faith.” Speaker Brian Myers will teach from God’s Word, helping attendees understand how to stay anchored during the storms of life. Back by popular demand Friday night will be The Ball Brothers, and ventriloquist Greg Claassen will perform Saturday evening.

MBF is the stewardship ministry for U.S. Mennonite Brethren. Contact MBF at 800-551-1547 or visit [www.mbfoundation.com/celebrate2017](http://www.mbfoundation.com/celebrate2017) for more information. —MBF

## MB Foundation continues to grow

MB Foundation (MBF) continued to experience ministry growth in 2016, launching new initiatives designed to strengthen and empower the local church and affirming the strategy of the national Mennonite Brethren family.

One way MBF affirms the national MB family is through an annual gift to USMB. The gift for 2016 was \$220,801, an increase of \$44,000 from the previous year. MBF has been making a “firstfruits” gift to USMB since 2010 and recently increased the percentage of the gift to 11 percent of net profits.

Along with the new initiatives, MBF continued to assist donors with planned giving, helping facilitate gifts to their favorite ministries. Donor initiated gifts that passed through MBF to 280 charities totaled over \$3,100,000 in 2016. Total assets under management increased from \$174 million in 2015 to \$178 million in 2016. This increase marks the 26th consecutive year of asset growth. To view the complete 2016 Annual Report, visit [mbfoundation.com/2016annual-report](http://mbfoundation.com/2016annual-report). —MBF

# 5 minutes with...

## Mrs. Wiebe



At 86, Mrs. June Wiebe of Rapid City, SD, continues to pursue her lifelong joy of studying and sharing the Word of God. Whether it's teaching children's church at Bible Fellowship Church (for 27 years), leading the study at a nursing home or holding Sunday services for women at the Pennington County Jail, Mrs. Wiebe takes every opportunity to share the Word. She took a moment out from her studies to talk about 25 years of jail ministry, recently recognized on the Pennington County Sheriff's Office Facebook page and in a local television interview.

## FPU graduates 476

An estimated 476 new graduates—201 from the traditional undergraduate program, 130 from the bachelor's degree completion program, 127 from the graduate program and 18 from Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary—received diplomas May 6 from Fresno Pacific University, the Mennonite Brethren-owned university in Fresno, Calif. U.S. Senate chaplain Barry C. Black brought more than 5,000 graduates, faculty, administrators and guests to their feet with his energetic insistence that failure is not an option for followers of Christ.—*FPU*

## Tabor College celebrates 107th commencement



Tabor College, the Mennonite Brethren college in Hillsboro, Kan., held its 107th commencement May 20. Of the 177 graduates, 114 earned degrees at the Hillsboro campus while 63 completed degrees at Tabor College Wichita and online. Of those, 20 individuals earned master's degrees in business, ministry or nursing. Commencement speaker Roger Camping, a 1976 TC graduate, urged graduates to "build something great" by cultivating relationships.—*TC*

## Peru floods impact MB churches

Thirteen Mennonite Brethren churches in Peru were impacted by heavy flooding in April. A local El Niño phenomenon is blamed for the abnormal warming of coastal waters that resulted in rainfall 10 times the norm. The MB churches, totaling 467 members, are all located in the hard-hit areas in northwestern Peru—in Piura, Trujillo and Sullana.—*MB Mission, ICOMB*

### How many come to your Sunday afternoon gatherings?

The room is small so we can only have 15 women at the most. They all look so perfectly innocent sitting around the table. We are not allowed to hug them, but we have close fellowship, and they confide in us because they know we care about them.

### What kinds of concerns do they have?

The biggest cause for women being there is addictions of various kinds. Most all of them have children, and it is a deep sorrow to have their children taken from them. I have volumes of papers of prayer requests from the ladies.

### Do you need special credentials for jail ministry?

You have to have a criminal background check. When I started, they also registered me as clergy because I had been a missionary. As clergy, I can do one-on-one visits.

### What do you do in the one-on-one visits?

I always ask them if they have ever asked Christ to be their personal Savior. My husband, Waldo, was a tremendous soul-winner. He and I often used a Scripture-based plan that he developed to lead people to Christ. I use that same plan with the women.

### Do you have a favorite verse you share?

I always give them Scripture, but the Holy Spirit has to reveal to me what to say because each person's need is different. I have had a lot of exposure to the Scripture and memorized a lot. It's such a blessing how God makes you aware of a certain Scripture to meet a need at a certain time.

See Mrs. Wiebe's television interview at: <http://www.kotatv.com/content/news/Helpers-Behind-Bars—421549413.html>

*Interview by Kathy Heinrichs Wiest*

# Learning in the desert

Families live out discipleship while on mission trip

**T**wenty-eight people ages one to 70 from Hesston (Kan.) MB Church traveled to Phoenix, Ariz., March 18-24 over our spring break to serve with Axiom Church, a four-year-old USMB church plant. As I reflect on the trip, I am amazed at how easily our USMB three core commitments were accomplished.

**Church multiplication, church planting and evangelism:** Both churches learned from each other. Axiom Church folks shared stories about learning from us about serving their city, generosity and caring across state lines. Our team talked about how they desire to be more involved in small groups like we experienced at Axiom and the excitement of new followers of Christ who were excited to grow. Through distributing 1,000 door hangers, people were invited to Axiom's Easter service where they heard the good news that Christ died for sinners.

**Intentional disciple-making:** It was a joy to watch parents and kids work together. I personally enjoyed spending time and growing and learning with my youngest daughter. We Hesston pastors were not sure what to expect when the trip was made up of parents and children instead of youth, as we had anticipated. But we quickly learned that our kids worked hard! We spent about 12 hours working on the backyard of a single mom. This included planting bushes/trees, spreading decorative rock across the entire yard, pouring a concrete slab and installing a basketball goal. Discipleship happened as moms and dads helped and taught their son or daughter during the backyard project. As we prepared for the trip, we saw discipleship as families discussed what spiritual gifts each had.

We parents talk often about serving and giving, but this was lived out during the week.

**Developing leaders:** One of the ways Axiom is raising up leaders is through their monthly leadership meetings. During these evenings, leaders are equipped through teaching on a variety of topics. Our group was blessed by the teaching on prayer. I also had the opportunity to teach and train Axiom's children's leaders. It is so easy to get stuck in a rut when you go to the same church week in and week out. This partnership between Hesston MB and Axiom reminded us that we can benefit from conversation, learning and encouragement from one another.

I am excited to hear more stories about how God worked in and through Axiom and Hesston MB Church. God continues to show that he was leading and moving from beginning to end. He provided financially through our church family (\$7,000 given, including an anonymous gift of \$3,500), the prayer support of our church (a commissioning prayer on Sunday before we left and the congregation praying individually for each member of our team) and how our presence in Phoenix was a blessing to Axiom Church.

Every church in the USMB conference would benefit from a partnership between an established church and a church plant. This can happen on a variety of levels, whether it is through prayer, finances, resources, time and even planting. I am thankful for this experience with my daughter and want to give God all the glory for what occurred in the desert during spring break 2017.■



J.L. Martin began serving as pastor of children and family at Hesston (Kan.) MB Church in November 2008. He is a graduate of Denver Seminary. He and his wife, Bethany, have four children. Martin blogs at <http://daddy4ms.blogspot.com/>.

# My turn

Pain leads teen to prison; prison leads to God

**L**ife was not easy for anyone in my family.

Being Cambodian refugees in America was extremely hard. We did not know how to cope with the changes of being in another country. My family was riddled with anger, abuse, violence and addiction. There was so much pain in my family that some of my siblings ran away, some went to prison and some joined a gang.

I ended up following my older brother's footsteps into his gang and then into prison. The gang was the perfect place for a young man who grew up knowing only anger, violence and abuse. I was involved in over 30 strong-arm robberies in a period of two years, and I was in numerous gang fights. Being a gang member was fun—until the night I was looking to make a name for myself.

It was November 1993, and I was 17 years old and full of rage. That night I was involved in the death of a rival gang member. I was the main suspect, since I was the one who initiated the scum. I was now facing 30 years to life.

At a loss, I turned to Buddha for help. I cried out to Buddha every night when I was in juvenile hall and then the county jail. Then a chaplain came by and dropped off books. These books were about others in my position, facing hard time. I noticed a common theme: They all gave their lives to God. Soon, it would be my turn.

It was during my time in the county jail that I heard the call of the Holy Spirit for me to give my life to God. I rejected this call, and I told the Holy Spirit that I cannot, because I am a Buddhist. Then I heard the voice of the Holy Spirit tell me to give my life to God, and I surrendered my life to God one evening in March 1994.

I changed my "not guilty" plea to "guilty" and signed a plea bargain for second degree murder, which carried a sentence of 15 years to life. I served the remainder of my sentence in California's juvenile justice system.

Upon my release in October 2001, God led me to Hope Now For Youth, a parachurch organization that helped me obtain employment. I wanted to go back to school, and I ended up at Fresno Pacific University and then Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary, then known as MB Biblical Seminary. I earned a bachelor's degree in biblical and religious studies and a master's degree in Christian ministry.

I take full responsibility for my actions that landed me in jail. As a permanent resident with an aggravated felony, I have lost all hope of ever becoming a U.S. citizen. I have been ordered deported and regularly check in with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (I.C.E.). Even today, I face the prospect of being ripped from my wife, my three children, my mother-in-law, my church and community. If God allows it, I would like to be in vocational ministry the rest of my life. ■



Vanna In is youth pastor at North Fresno (Calif.) Church. He is married to Sokmarly and is the proud father of two boys and a girl: Arun, Jeevin and Thanny. His favorite quote is, "Preach the gospel at all times and when necessary use words" (traditionally attributed to St. Francis of Assisi).



# IN THE MIDDLE OF THE MESS

By Taryn Jost

**Following Jesus is not about being in control. It's about obedience and faithfulness.**



I love a good story. I love good character development and complex story lines. A good story often involves messy situations, and that messiness is what sucks me in. I connect with a character's struggles and emotions.

It's funny how I can be drawn to the messiness of the story in front of me, only to find myself undone by the messiness of my own story. I like order. I'm a list maker and a rule follower. When I set out to do something, I love having a plan and a set of steps in place that practically ensure success. It gives me a sense of grounding and control.

As a follower of Christ, I would love nothing more than to sit down each morning with the Father and get a rundown of exactly what he has planned for me and his kingdom that day. I would love to know the impact of what he has called me to, along with the long-range plan that he has for my life and ministry. It would allow me to see the big picture and maintain a sense of control. It would feel nice and tidy.

I'm learning, though, that as much as the Father has written my story for me, it's not really about me. Instead, it's about the Author himself. It's learning what it means to be in relationship with that Author and living in a way that always reflects the Author's heart.

### Doing life with Brien

Our friend Brien has played a huge role in teaching me this truth. He has shown me that this life is not about my impact. That the quality of my story is not measured by conversions or the number of people who attend the house church my husband, Vaughn, and I lead. Brien has pushed me to walk in the truth that this life is ultimately about being faithful and obedient to that which the Father calls me, all the while growing in my relationship with him.

Brien sounds like a wise man, eh? I'm guessing he is pretty wise in his own way. You'd have to be, to some extent, to survive on the streets as a homeless man for 20-plus years.

Brien came into our lives about six years ago. As our relationship with Brien grew, we began to open our home and our lives to him. I was sure that Brien needed us, and I was more than thrilled to get started with all I was going to teach him. Brien struggled in the manners department and had zero sense of boundaries. He was lonely and obviously needed Jesus. To put it crudely, Brien was a poster child for anyone looking to challenge themselves in living out the way of Jesus.

Early on I would think to myself how lucky we were to have Brien as part of our story. What an awesome opportunity to really experience the impact of loving the poor, the needy, the outcast. When we shared with people about Brien, they would see us doing true ministry. (The pride and ugliness of this whole thought process is not lost on me.)

And thus, we dove into doing life with Brien. It didn't take long for the romance of a good story to wear off. No matter how much we extended ourselves to Brien, it was never enough. We wrestled with what it looked like to be generous while still setting healthy boundaries. We were also forced to wrestle with the heaviness we felt each time we dropped Brien off on the street corner in the cold. What did it mean to care for Brien, to love him well?

### Transformation

As we educated ourselves about the resources available to Brien, we were met with his own refusal to follow or work

through the process required to gain access to those resources. Brien would often call Vaughn and me in a time of need, only to berate us for not helping him the way he thought we should.

I'll be honest: Brien took me places few other people could. He pushed my buttons in such a way that I often found myself nose to nose with him, screaming and yelling. My heart became weary, and my emotions were shot.

I found myself asking, "What do you want from us, Lord? We're doing everything we can to help this man. This feels like a huge mess. I thought surely transformation would come as a result of Brien experiencing the love of Jesus."

Over time it became evident that transformation was taking place—transformation in my own heart. As the years passed, I began to learn that ministry is not about outcomes. It is not something I can control with my actions and choices. It is not about having someone or something to point to in order to prove I'm doing it right. It's not about feeling accomplished or effective. It's not about whether I'm having any kind of impact.

In surrendering my desire for control and results, I've come to recognize that living the way of Jesus really boils down to faithfulness and obedience. And it really is a messy business. There are no handbooks or manuals that walk me through what faithfulness and obedience look like. Scripture does not spell out how faithfulness and obedience play out for me on Bannock Street in Littleton, Colo.

### Called to the unexpected

You'd think God would make it super clear. That he'd want us to know exactly how to do what he's called us to do. Yet, as he often does, God does the unexpected and calls us to something that is not always clear. In doing so, we are forced to press into a more intimate relationship with him. I'm compelled to seek his face and listen for his voice. I'm forced to ask hard questions and recognize my own brokenness. And as my intimacy with God develops, he does a work in me that allows me to grow in my likeness of him.

I'm learning to be thankful for the mess I've been invited into. I'm a bit embarrassed as I think of all that I thought I might teach Brien. I'm humbled and thankful for all that Brien has taught me. I never pictured this part of my story playing out this way, and yet I'm pretty sure that's exactly how the Father intended it. The less I know, the more I must trust the One that does. With time, I'm learning to find life in this way of doing things.

Order is a good thing. We serve a God of order. However, it doesn't seem like Jesus was ever afraid of the mess that was around him. As a matter of fact, I would say he embraced it; he ministered in the midst of it; he redeemed it. Living the way of Jesus is messy. Sometimes I think we see that mess as an indication that we're doing something wrong. I think more than not, it's an indication that we're right where we're supposed to be, and God is simply waiting to meet us in the middle of it all.

*Taryn Jost is a passionate follower of Jesus and is learning daily what it looks like to make him her first love. She and her husband, Vaughn, live in Littleton, Colo., with their four daughters. The Josts lead the Micah Project, a faith community in Littleton. ▀*

# When we walk together

Spiritual mentoring as modeled by  
Moses, Jesus and Paul

**L**et me begin with a testimony. I attend one of the most diverse churches I've ever seen. Four congregations, three primary languages, a variety of ethnic groups: African-Americans, Hispanics from several countries, attendees from half a dozen Asian cultures and of course Anglos from all over the United States and some from Europe.

The ethnic diversity may pale next to the economic and cultural diversity. Couples that have been married north of 60 years worshipping with widows and widowers, never-marrieds, people living together but not yet married and single moms who may have children from more than one relationship. People with substantial wealth sitting next to people receiving public assistance. People with tattoos and piercings beside people who would never consider such things.

Then there are the spiritual differences: Adults who are 75 or



By Jim Holm

more who have been in church virtually every Sunday since they were born praying with people who came to Jesus last year and some who haven't yet come to Jesus at all. There are people who could name all the books of the Bible—in order—in a small group with people that might not be able to find the New Testament. It's all here, every single week, and by the grace of God, it works.

A melting pot of humanity like this brings a variety of issues. Some people haven't managed their finances and are not even sure where their money goes. Some struggle with building relationships, resolving conflict, raising children or coping with teenagers. Some have never learned to trust God when the rug is pulled from beneath their feet. Every Sunday these people come to worship with people who can account for every penny they have, have worked in conflict situations and resolved them for years and have loads of experience at dealing with children and youth. Others have gone through deep valleys and have found God to be faithful throughout.

### **Forging relationships, sharing life**

Our theme this year—with this church I've just described—is “relationship.” God brings us together for his purpose. How can we walk together, two by two, sharing life experiences, praying for and learning from each other?

What do those of us who have travelled farther down the path of life with Jesus owe our brothers and sisters who haven't yet gotten as far in their life journey? Do we who have journeyed longer have anything that is profitable to share with our fellow worshippers?

And on the other side, what can we “experienced” disciples pick up from the excitement and enthusiasm for Jesus we see in newcomers? These new believers and seekers have a freshness, a simple trust, a belief that trusting Jesus actually changes lives, while we who have been around the track sometimes feel jaded. Walking together is a mutual learning experience; sharing goes both ways.

So, we posed a question in our congregations: “Are you ready to seek a relationship with someone in the church to whom you might be an encourager, a partner, a prayer warrior and a friend? To mentor or to be mentored by a spiritual guide, a fellow traveler?”

I pose the same question to you who are reading this. Will you consider seeking and developing a new spiritual friendship, learning to know someone in your congregation with whom you can share your experiences of Jesus and learn from theirs?

Perhaps you are interested, but wonder how to begin. Let's start with the Scriptures. Here are three biblical examples of spiritual mentoring. All three are intentional and focused, and all three lead to outstanding results.

### **Moses and Joshua**

Begin with Moses and Joshua. Joshua came from a very distinguished family; his grandfather was the chief man of one of the 12 tribes of Israel. Joshua himself must have had a warm spirit toward God, which neither his father nor his grandfather possessed. They both died in the wilderness because of their unbelief, and Joshua did not. Moses picked Joshua for his chief of staff, his closest aide.

We first meet Joshua in Exodus 17. The Amalekites have attacked the Hebrews and Moses needs an armed forces commander. He chooses Joshua. Moses goes up on a hill to watch the battle; Moses lifts his hands in victory, and Joshua wins the fight.

Joshua becomes a full-time assistant. In Exodus 24, when Moses goes up God's mountain to receive the Ten Commandments, he takes only one person: Joshua. Joshua doesn't get all the way to the summit, but farther than anyone else. And he waits there, while Moses stays on top, for 40 days. That mountain sojourn does not end peacefully: The people at the bottom make a golden calf and worship it. Joshua sees how Moses handles that crisis, and Joshua uses that knowledge later on in his own leadership role.

Joshua learns to be disciplined and to receive correction. In Numbers 11, Moses is angry because the people are complaining about the food. He pours out his frustra-

tions to God, and God promises to spread the spirit of prophecy around on some others so that Moses doesn't have to carry so much responsibility. When the prophesying starts, Joshua becomes upset that some are prophesying in the wrong way—not by the book. Moses tells Joshua that he is wrong to be upset. Joshua listens, takes the advice and absorbs his lesson.

Joshua doesn't know it, but he is being prepared for a tremendous task—to be Moses' replacement. Do you remember that Joshua was picked to be one of the 12 spies going into the land of Canaan? When 10 of the spies give up any hope of conquest, Joshua and one other man hold out, standing against the crowd, against public opinion, for the will of the Lord. When the announcement comes that Joshua will be the new leader, the people cheer at his commissioning ceremony. They know that this young man had been prepared to take this role.

### **Jesus and his disciples**

Also consider Jesus and his disciples. Jesus knows that he must pass along what he knows to his followers. But these 12 are ignorant, narrow-minded, superstitious, prejudiced, impulsive, judgmental and hot-headed. Do you see potential there? Jesus does.

Jesus calls these fellows to walk with him, and what do they learn? Prayer, fasting, spiritual disciplines, standing up to pressure, evangelism, cross-bearing, humility, self-control and forgiveness. He teaches them self-sacrifice, self-control, serving, washing feet and how to wait on God. And when Jesus prays his final prayer on earth, he does not pray for the crowds, but for these 12.

### **The apostle Paul**

Finally, there's the apostle Paul. He seems to have mentored all sorts of people—Aquila, Priscilla, Apollos, Silas, Titus, Timothy and John Mark. Timothy may have received more of his attention than anyone else.

From what we can gather, Timothy is timid, vulnerable, has a weak stomach, looks young for his age, is not very strong, is the nervous type, is afraid of hardship and perhaps even sometimes is ashamed of Paul. But Paul enters into a relationship with him and mentors him.

Here's the short version of the story. Acts 16 tells how Paul calls Timothy, and 1 Timothy 4 speaks of the prophetic gift which Timothy receives. In 1 Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians, Paul, who is in prison or travelling elsewhere, sends Timothy to two of the most difficult churches in the New Testament. The Thessalonian congregation had become confused and troubled about Christ's second coming while the church in Corinth was just a mess. And when Paul needs someone to send to straighten things out, he sends Timothy.

Call it mentoring or relationship building or training or whatever. Moses and Joshua, Jesus and his disciples and Paul and Timothy illustrate what mentoring is meant to be: a relationship, a friending, a learning to know and a sharing of experiences of life. It illustrates what we are seeking for our congregations during this year.

So again the question: Many of us have a lot of experiences—some good, others not so good. Can we pray that God will open up the possibility of developing a relationship with another person so that together we can share what we have learned—walking together, learning from each other and growing? Who knows? Could there be another Joshua among us, another Timothy?

Being part of a diverse church is an invigorating experience. It is a tremendous challenge, but an exhilarating experience. But maybe, in our diversity, we can actually learn from each other, mentor one another. That can give today's exhilaration an eternal benefit.

*Jim Holm is the pastor of Faith Community, one of four congregations of Butler Church, a USMB congregation in Fresno, Calif. ▀*



# Welcome to the table

**Hospitality is not optional for Jesus' followers**

By Rick Bartlett

I was a Fresno Pacific college student when I started dating Karen Martens, the woman who would become my wife. At the time I had no idea of the stature of Elmer and Phyllis Martens in the Mennonite Brethren church and wider Christian world. Elmer was the president of MB Biblical Seminary, had nurtured connections all over the world and was a child of a second-generation MB missionary to India.

When Karen invited me over for a meal with her family, I readily accepted. But I wondered at the invitation since I grew up in a home where the only guests we ever had over for a meal were extended family. I later came to appreciate just how normal hospitality was in the Martens' house.

I have been profoundly formed and shaped in how I think about hospitality by my in-laws, who both sadly passed away

unexpectedly last autumn. Throughout our married life I can't remember how many times Karen's family would gather on Sunday afternoons, Saturday nights, holidays or birthdays, and when we'd arrive there would be "others" at the table with us. Sitting there could be seminary professors, students, international students from Fresno State or guests from around the world—Congo, India, Japan, etc.—who had come to Fresno and were immediately invited by Elmer for dinner.

If I'm honest, I was often annoyed by these guests. "This is a family event," I would fume to my wife, "why did they invite ...?"

But over time, my perspective changed. Karen and I lived in England for seven years. We experienced hospitality and community from individuals within our work networks and local

church who had us in as guests at Christmas or who made sure to do something special for our birthdays. Amazing people who made us feel welcomed in a foreign place, just like Elmer and Phyllis in Fresno.

My job with Youth for Christ in Britain involved travel. I visited numerous countries including Ireland, Poland, Congo and New Zealand. One thing was consistent: In each of these places I was welcomed, fed, given a place to sleep and treated like family. All because of our shared relationship through Christ.

### Hospitality is a sacred act

Hebrews 13: 1-3 is intriguing: “Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.”

Hospitality is a sign of a loving community, and the act of hospitality is not optional for Christians. As one can see above from verse one, the engine that drives hospitality is love. It leads me to ponder: If we’re not loving, then how can we be hospitable? In biblical culture, hospitality was a sacred duty (see Gen. 18:1-8; Judges 13:3-21).

Recently, I experienced what I can only define as this kind of radical hospitality. I’m currently the director of a master’s degree at Tabor College in Ministry Entrepreneurship and Innovation, and one of the components of this degree program is an international trip. Each year we visit someone in our MB family who is serving overseas to see what they do and to listen and learn. Last June we were in Turkey.

It was Ramadan while we were there. Ramadan, one of the five pillars of Islam, is a month when Muslims fast from food and water from sunup to sundown. This season added an interesting twist to our trip!

It was our first full day in the country, and we walked around a city in eastern Turkey visiting a variety of interesting sights, including an old mosque. Our guide had been fasting all day. Even though the students and I had lunch with the MB workers there, we were getting hungry as the day wore on. We jumped into the van and made our way to our last stop.

### Treated like family

As we walked up to a doorway in the wall, I wasn’t sure where we were headed. Our guide led us into a courtyard where we

were greeted warmly, asked to take off our shoes, given a pair of slip-ons to wear and led to a room with low tables set out for a banquet. It was then I learned we were invited to break the fast with our guide, driver and others from the community at a special meal called “iftar.”

This was so surprising. All my life I’d been taught that Muslims wanted to be separate, yet here we were being treated like family around the table as we feasted. Our hosts extended hospitality to us North American Christians.

Evangelical Christians for years have been praying for the 10/40 window. How ironic that as God is answering our prayers and opening this part of the world through migration, it appears many Christians are so concerned about safety and security that we fail to welcome and demonstrate hospitality.

Since the Arab Spring, MB Mission has been reporting in *Witness* that now is the time to act, now is the time to reach out. God is giving us a chance to be hospitable. Are we putting our heads in the sand? Why do so many Americans who claim to follow Christ appear afraid to offer the soul hospitality of truly knowing people? Are we disciples of Jesus or simply standing at the station with our ticket to heaven, waiting for the train?

Wherever we have lived, Karen and I have invited people over for meals. When we can, we include international students or others traveling through. As Leonard Sweet writes in *Tablet to Table*, “The story of Christianity didn’t take shape behind pulpits or on altars or in books. No, the story of Christianity takes shape around tables, as people face one another as equals, telling stories, sharing memories, enjoying food with one another.”

I have experienced this in Thailand, Congo, Turkey, Ireland, Bolivia, Colombia and many of the other places where I’ve met with God’s people. In turn, we have tried to do the same. Sometimes uncomfortable? Yes. Worth it? Always.

*Rick Bartlett, currently director of theological education at Tabor College Wichita in Kansas, has worked with youth and young adults for over 30 years. He is a 1992 graduate of MB Biblical Seminary and a 2006 graduate of George Fox University where he earned a doctor of ministry in Leadership in the Emerging Culture. He is the co-author of Consuming Youth published by Zondervan/YS Academic. Bartlett and his wife, Karen, have been married 31 years and have two children, Grace and Toby. They live in Wichita, Kan. ▀*

## Becoming more hospitable

The goal of hospitality is welcoming people, valuing them and asking them questions. Create a welcoming space in order to offer hospitality without a hidden agenda. Here are five action steps to developing hospitality.

- Travel if you can. Visit MB Mission workers and spend time listening and learning the stories of those they serve. I have grown the most in hospitality when I’m immersed in a different culture.

- Recognize that your house is enough. I have friends living in a Tiny House who regularly have guests over for meals. Our first house in the United Kingdom had rooms that were 10 x 10, and we still hosted meals. A small apartment will do.

- You don’t have to create a fancy meal. Soup and bread are ok.

- Don’t know what to say? Ask your guests to share their story or pick up pre-selected questions. This is a helpful site: <https://www.conversationexchange.com/resources/conversation-topics.php>

- Be sure to invite singles if you’re a married couple.

\* \* \*

*For an excellent (25 minute) explanation of hospitality, listen to this podcast from Tabor College Ministry Entrepreneurship and Innovation student Heath Hollensbe titled, How to Beat the Fear of Rejection: <http://www.stitcher.com/podcast/lifeschool-podcast/e/49234741?autoplay=true>*

## LeadGen provides scholarships for future MB leaders

MB Foundation establishes fund to help train full-time pastors, missionaries

Jon Fiester was flooded with relief and gratitude when he heard the news. He had received a \$3,000 scholarship from MB Foundation's newly created Leadership Generation Fund. Now he didn't need to accept as many side construction jobs to keep his education debt at bay. He could focus more time on studying, working as the associate pastor at Bible Fellowship Church, a Mennonite Brethren congregation in Rapid City, SD, and spending time with his wife and two children.

"Help with school is huge," he says. "I think there are a lot of people who would like to further their education, but the reality of being able to do it is hard. It's great being part of a denomination where there is help available when you need it."

### The fund

MB Foundation recently started LeadGen, as the scholarship fund is known, to provide financial aid for individuals considering full-time leadership as a USMB pastor or missionary. The fund will provide up to \$50,000 per year to increase the pool of MB trained pastoral leaders.

"It's touching to know that, in the (MB Foundation) board's case as volunteer leaders, their decision to make this a priority is well-received with gratitude, and as a staff to know we're part of what enabled it to happen," says Jon Wiebe, president and CEO of MB Foundation. "It's very rewarding."

The idea behind the fund came from USMB's new strategy and core commitments revealed at the National Convention in July 2016. The new vision aims to empower local MB churches to reach



Jon Fiester, right, is one of 18 individuals to receive financial aid from MB Foundation's Leadership Generation Fund. The grant has allowed Fiester, pictured here distributing Bibles May 21 to high school graduates at Bible Fellowship Church, to avoid side jobs as he works toward a master's degree through Tabor College Wichita. *Photo credit: Bible Fellowship Church*

their full God-given ministry potential by focusing on three areas: church multiplication and evangelism, intentional disciple-making and developing leaders.

"We've been looking for new ways to get involved in a variety of things the denomination is doing," Wiebe says. "Of course, we can talk all day about how our stewardship programs help benefit all those things, but this is another way for us to lean in and get involved in one of those areas, which is leadership development."

LeadGen offers three progressively increasing scholarship levels, which require increasing levels of commitment. Level one provides up to \$500 for high school students to participate in one- to three-month programs such as Faith Front. Level two offers up to \$2,000 for students to attend MB institutions or participate in six- to 12-month programs. Level three provides up to \$3,000 for seminary or graduate students attending MB institutions. Once awarded, the funds are allocated toward the relevant nonprofit organization.

### The recipients

Fiester recently completed his second of five semesters through Tabor College Wichita, working toward a master's degree in Ministry Entrepreneurship and Innovation. The 34-year-old aims to use these entrepreneurial skills to engage the community with new eyes, evaluate their needs and find ways for the church to fill them.

"Our culture has shifted from a Christian mindset to a post-Christian mindset, and a lot of churches haven't figured that out yet," he says. "Our church needs to leave its walls and meet the community where they're at and build relationships."

For example, Bible Fellowship Church hosted a trunk-or-treat event for a nearby low-income apartment complex and counted 800 attendees.

"All churches should ask, 'If we moved, would the neighborhood notice?' If they don't, there is probably a problem there," Fiester says. "The more engaged we get with our community the better results we produce. People want

to know if we are going to build relationships and be there for them in their daily lives. Out of those relationships the opportunities to share the gospel arise.”

The Nebraska native knows ministry is where God wants him. Multiple times while deciding whether to stay in construction or step into more ministry, injuries have kept him from the hammer and nail.

“Every time I’ve tried to do anything else, God has eliminated those other options,” Fiester says. “I’ve done a lot of other jobs in my life, but when I’m not doing that I don’t feel fulfilled.”

### The purpose

Don Morris, USMB national director, says initiatives like LeadGen—as well as an upcoming August leadership summit—will enable MB agencies and institutions to work together to enhance leadership development.

“Developing leaders will consistently be a necessary focus. As older leaders retire and as churches and ministries grow, gaining additional good, educated, called and passionate leaders in all capacities will be crucial,” Morris says. “So, not only do we need to call out and develop leaders for pastoral roles, we must also help our local churches develop qualified leaders for local church ministry. If we aren’t helping to develop leaders, then there will definitely be a deficit in the numbers of needed leaders throughout our church and conference.”

As of June 7, LeadGen has provided 18 individuals with \$17,000 worth of scholarships, and funds are still available. Applications and scholarship requirements can be found at [www.mbfoundation.com/LeadGen](http://www.mbfoundation.com/LeadGen).

“It just seems like it’s exactly what we’re hoping to do,” Wiebe says. “Help leaders that are being called out and trained for ministry. And 10 years from now, who knows what their story will be?” — *Jenae Suderman* ■

## SOAR ripples across Santa Cruz

### MB Mission, California congregations partner to love community

Perhaps it’s a small thing in the grand scheme of things: A team of about 30 youth from California’s Central Valley served on a short-term, nine-day mission experience in nearby Santa Cruz, Calif. They didn’t even have to hop on a plane or secure passports to get there. Their work involved small efforts, like weeding, painting and praying. Not exactly world-changing stuff.

But little pebbles make big ripples.

“Small things make huge impact,” says Marcus Vidal, youth pastor at Rosedale Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif., and SOAR Santa Cruz participant.

MB Mission staff led the team of youth and adult leaders from Rosedale

and Shafter (Calif.) MB Church in serving Shorelife Community Church, a Mennonite Brethren congregation in the Santa Cruz area, April 7-15. SOAR is MB Mission’s 10-day short-term, multigenerational program with trips based in the U.S., Canada and Mexico. According to Mark Thompson, MB Mission’s short-term mobilizer, SOAR opportunities aim to develop missional vision closer to home, while still making an impact on “least-reached” areas.

And despite its beach resort reputation, Santa Cruz is a community in need of the love of Christ. Shorelife pastor Trevor Lee describes the prevailing mindset as very “spiritual,” but notes, “Spiritual doesn’t mean Christ-like.” Only a very small slice of the population—less than 4 percent, according to one estimate—would claim a Christian faith other than Catholic.

In the community surrounding the Shorelife congregation, that spiritual darkness is compounded by a sense of self-sufficiency and complacency born of affluence. And yet, homelessness and



As the SOAR Santa Cruz volunteers served the community around Shorelife Community Church, they helped the small congregation expand their ministry and build relationships in the larger USMB family. “We are a small church locally, but we are part of a bigger church,” says Shorelife pastor Trevor Lee. *Photo credit: Brent Cummings*

deep physical and mental health needs are also present, making for a community of deep contrasts.

“Here we are in paradise, but it’s not a paradise for so many,” says Lee. It is a difficult place to be the church, and Shorelife is small—only about 25 families. Yet the Shorelife congregation faithfully works to spread the love of Jesus in this unique community.

Projects for the SOAR team were designed to give Shorelife’s ministry a lift. John Ahlum, Shorelife’s associate pastor, says they chose projects by considering: “How can we generously bring the love and presence of Christ?” They especially targeted places in which the community members and families gather.

The team picked up trash on the beach, pulled weeds at the middle school, painted a city building and distributed sack lunches to the homeless downtown. They also prayed as they walked the neighborhood and passed out invitations to a community BBQ at the church—the “apex” of the mission, attended by an estimated 150 from the church and community. That final event was clearly a highlight, full of life, joy and “buzz,” says Thompson. “It just felt like the presence of God was there.”

Small pebbles. But Shorelife’s Ahlum is convinced that those small acts of love will make a difference in their community. “The love of Christ never comes back empty,” he says.

Some ripples are already evident, like positive conversations with middle school staff and city workers who saw the team at work. And like good connections made at the BBQ. “We started something that could help that church grow,” says Vidal.

More ripples can be seen in the relationships formed between the three churches involved. Since Shafter and Rosedale youth served together on the SOAR team, they learned to know those from another church. At first, getting the students to mingle required a bit of encouragement, but by

the end of SOAR, new friendships were forming.

The experience has rekindled an interest in working together for the two MB churches, which are located only about 15 minutes apart. Both youth pastors talk about doing a summer youth event together.

Connections with Shorelife are likely to continue as well. Shafter MB sent a team to Shorelife for SOAR Santa Cruz in 2013, and Shafter MB youth pastor Brent Cummings was part of the impetus to go back this year. Cummings had appreciated the way Lee loved on his team and had seen the need in the Santa Cruz community. So as he worked with Thompson to plan a spring break mission trip for the Shafter youth group, Cummings knew Shorelife would be a great place to consider.

Cummings sees this SOAR trip as

building on the 2013 trip—“continuing the story”—and hopes that Shafter MB youth might go back for a weekend or that Lee might share at Shafter MB. Rosedale’s Vidal is likewise making a point to regularly have conversations with Lee and Ahlum and says the Rosedale youth who participated now have a personal interest in the ministry of Shorelife.

For Shorelife’s part, Lee says he’d welcome the team back tomorrow. Although keeping up with hardworking youth had its challenges, it was encouraging to have other churches partner in Shorelife’s ministry. “We’re a small church, so we can’t do mission away from home, but we have a really big mission field on our doorstep,” Lee says. “So the more people who can work with us, the merrier.”

—Myra Holmes

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## TC's Project SEARCH equips young adults with special needs

Community, churches enriched through program

**L**ike most parents, Bruce and Kimberlee Jost, members of Ebenfeld MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan., have simple dreams beyond high school for their two daughters, Ella and Talia: to live independently, have meaningful work, contribute to their community and pursue their passions.

But Ella, 14, has Down Syndrome. In a town of fewer than 3,000 in a rural area, even these simple dreams for her

seemed out of reach. Marion County offers no supported living, no school-to-work transition program and few job opportunities. The couple wondered whether they would have to relocate or give up their own dreams in order to provide a future for Ella.

"It was pretty bleak," Bruce says.

Enter Project SEARCH, a business-led, school-to-work program for young adults with significant intellectual and developmental disabilities. A new Project SEARCH site at Tabor College, the Mennonite Brethren-owned school in Hillsboro, promises to help young adults with disabilities, the Hillsboro community and area churches reach their full potential.

For the Josts, who introduced Project SEARCH to the community, the partnership means Ella will have options

when she finishes high school in a few years. "We had no hope, and that has changed," says Kimberlee.

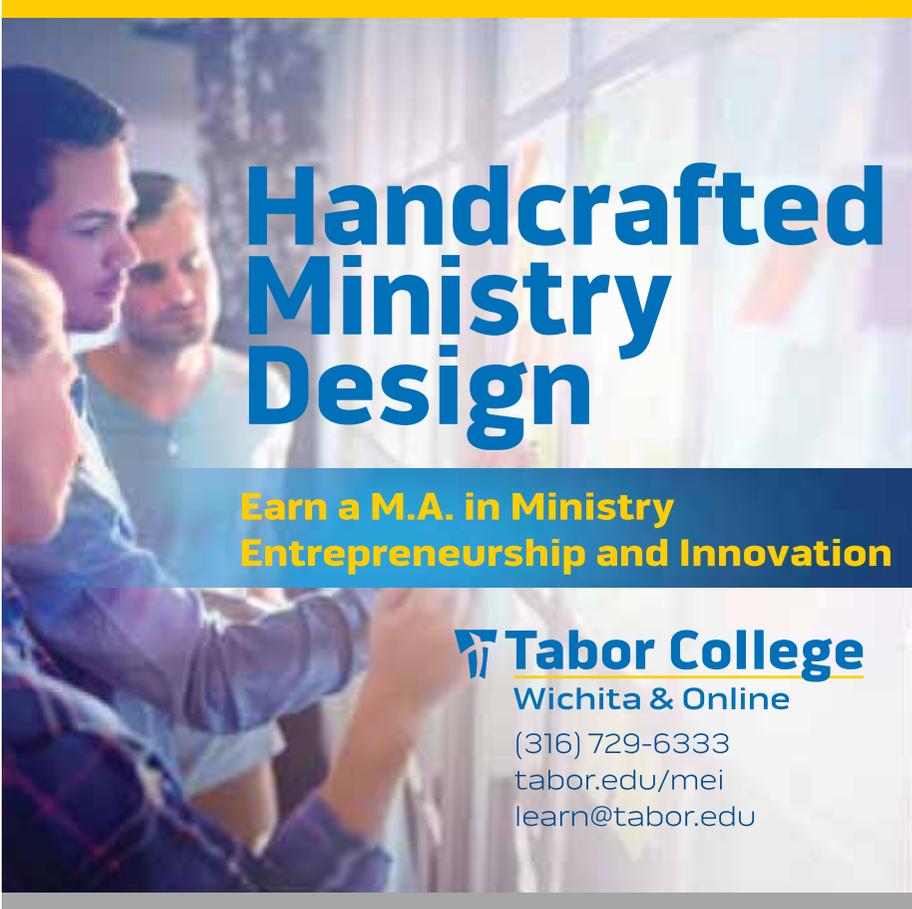
Project SEARCH comes to Marion County through a partnership between Marion County Special Education Cooperative and Tabor. The first four interns will begin their assignments next month: Tanner Jasper and Alexandria Larson of Hillsboro, Kan.; and Christopher Anderson and Ryan Hutton of Newton, Kan. The primary goal of the program is competitive employment for these young adults. Accordingly, interns will participate in three work internships at Tabor over the course of a scholastic year.

That alone provides significant hope for disabled young adults and their families. Rob Haude, chair of the Project SEARCH advisory committee, says real work at competitive wages provides the means to live independently and the fulfillment of contributing to and being valued in the eyes of the community.

As the largest employer in the county, Tabor is an ideal business partner. Danean Landis, Tabor's liaison for the Marion County program, says already seven departments of the college have identified work opportunities for the interns. Assignments might include wiping tables in the cafeteria, organizing sports gear, cleaning with the maintenance crew, stuffing envelopes for alumni relations or a variety of similar tasks.

Project SEARCH aims to enrich the lives of interns beyond job skills as well. Work assignments are accompanied by classroom instruction in a variety of "soft skills": communication, budgeting, computer skills and the like.

Haude, who has a decade of experience as a special education teacher and who will lead this classroom instruction, says such skills are necessary to job success, but those with intellectual or developmental disabilities often struggle with them.



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"The goal of Project SEARCH is to help people with disabilities gain employment," says Rob Haude, chair of the Project SEARCH advisory committee. "These are excellent young people with bright futures, and we're excited to see all that they will accomplish through the program." Haude, left, is pictured with Ryan Hutton, one of the first four interns selected to be part of the program in its inaugural year. *Photo credit: Project SEARCH*

The program at Tabor will also offer interns both formal and informal ways to build relationships and connections. Interns will be paired with education students for mentoring that is unique to Tabor's program. Haude points out that those with disabilities often don't have the kind of mentoring relationships that everyone craves. "To be able to provide them with that is priceless," he says.

In addition, mentors will be encouraged to go with interns to community events such as ball games, concerts or plays to begin to form informal connections within the community—connections that will build a support system and might lead to a job.

While Project SEARCH makes no claim to be a Christian program, faith is an integral part of any full life, and the hope is that Tabor's interns will grow spiritually as well. The program doesn't formally include faith formation; interns won't take Bible classes, for example. But Tabor is a Christ-centered community, and faith infuses life on campus in countless informal ways.

Landis says that interns will undoubtedly encounter faith through conversations and relationships and will experience the love of Christ extended to them and modeled for them. "Tabor people are special," she says. "This campus cares about the people who walk it day in and day out, and we're really focused on that whole idea of preparing people for learning, work and service outside of Tabor."

As the Project SEARCH interns complete the program and pursue jobs and a full life, the community will be enriched as well. Haude points out that all people are created in God's image. "When we are living fully in God's image, our families and communities and churches will benefit," says Haude.

Too often, he says, stereotypes hinder businesses from hiring those with disabilities. As Tabor provides a role model and area businesses begin to hire those who complete the Project SEARCH program, he expects those stereotypes will begin to break down. "[The Project SEARCH graduates] will only enrich

our communities, and businesses will see that their business is enhanced by these individuals," he says.

Area churches, too, will move toward full ministry potential as Project SEARCH provides new encouragement and resources to reach out to those with disabilities. Marion County is home to four MB churches: Hillsboro MB Church, Parkview MB Church and Ebenfeld MB Church in Hillsboro and Good News Christian Fellowship in Marion.

Haude believes that churches want to serve but often don't know where to begin. "I hope and pray that this program might be a way that churches can become aware of how to serve these individuals," he says. "I look forward to that happening." He says that Project SEARCH organizers have met with members of three area ministerial alliances, who have expressed enthusiastic support and committed to pray.

Kimberlee Jost, who is not only the parent of a special-needs daughter but also serves on the Project SEARCH steering committee, dreams that Mennonite Brethren business owners in the area would lead the way in hiring those who've completed the program. Already, she's been pleased with the openness of the business owners with whom she's had conversations. Beyond that, she sees endless ways church members might be involved—as generous givers, job coaches, support for families or connections for interns. "The future is wide open," she says.

From his perspective as a parent, Bruce Jost says that Project SEARCH at Tabor is all about the kind of abundant life that Christ promised his followers. "This is a way that others—Christians, non-Christians, urban churches, rural churches—can see that abundant life is possible for those with special needs."

"And," Kimberlee adds, "that possibly they will lead the way." —*Myra Holmes* ▀

## Church capitalizes on new opportunities

Merger offers churches ways to strengthen impact

**W**hen two congregations in Harvey, ND, made the decision to become one a little over a year ago, it created an opportunity to reboot the church to better reach their community.

Harvey MB Church and Bethel Baptist Church were both in transition when their leaders began to ponder: What if we joined forces? For some, admittedly, the questions were motivated by a concern for survival: “If we don’t try to join, very likely neither will survive very

long,” as Bob Bartz, long-time church attendee from Bethel Baptist, says.

So the two congregations began exploring the idea of a merger and officially became Cornerstone Community Church in January 2016. As they worked through the practical and relational challenges of the merger—and there were many—they began to realize that this could be more than a last-ditch effort to survive; it was a chance to start fresh.

Abel Threton took on leadership of the new congregation as intentional interim pastor in March 2016 and consistently encouraged the congregation to abandon skepticism and mistrust and to work together for the kingdom. As a result, Bartz says, the focus of the congregation has slowly shifted from survival to the church’s call to be ambassadors to Harvey and beyond.

“We’re in the Lord’s work,” says Bartz. “We have to concentrate on that.”

Now, a little over a year since the merger, Cornerstone Community Church is poised to make an impact.

“They are in a better position to respond to the needs of the community than they were before,” says Rick Eshbaugh, former part-time pastor of Harvey MB and now full-time district minister for the Central District Conference.

Bringing together the gifts and talents of two congregations more than doubles the pool of resources—not only financial resources but also gifted leaders, children’s workers, musicians—and provides for “a more complete church environment,” says Eshbaugh.

Those additional workers have enabled Cornerstone to build upon the strengths of each congregation. Even before the merger, Bethel Baptist was known in the community for a successful Awana program and Harvey MB hosted a strong youth group. New, enthusiastic volunteers have strengthened both programs, and Bartz notes that many of the children and youth who come have no other church connections.

In addition, merging offers a model of Christ-like unity that is itself a significant witness in the community. Harvey is a small community—somewhere around 2,000—with 13 churches, many of which have been the result of “fracturing,” according to Eshbaugh. So when these two congregations come together, even willing to work through significant challenges for the sake of unity, that’s new. It catches attention.

Threton says that as Cornerstone Community attendees love each other well, it will be a magnet to their community. “We can’t love one another too much,” he says.

While Cornerstone Community Church still faces decisions and challenges, Threton believes the congregation is headed in a good direction. “I’m encouraged as we face the future,” he says. “We’ve not arrived, but we’re on

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# A season of multiplication

Mountain View launches new congregations

**E**veryone loves generosity. Everyone loves for churches to multiply. It may appear that the recipients of the generosity or the multiplication are the winners. However, I am here to say that the givers are even more blessed. We do well to remember and to believe the words of the Lord Jesus, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35, NLT).

At Mountain View we are so blessed to be in a season of multiplication.

■ We are sending the Mountain View Sunnyside campus pastor John and Sarah Richardson to plant a new church this fall called Prodigal. Joining him in the new church plant are the worship pastor with the worship team, the children’s director and a large group of people.

■ Our youth pastors Ken and Anna Wilkinson, who have served for almost 13 years at our main campus, are moving to Mountain View Sunnyside Aug. 1 to be the new campus pastors.

■ Executive pastors Dave and Connie Thiessen, who have served with me for 23 years, are going to Mountain View Sunnyside to assist Pastor Ken from Aug. 1 to Dec. 31.

■ June 1 we launched our newest campus, Centro Cristiano Mountain View. This campus is fully in Spanish and is led by Pastors Jose and Maria Sanchez.

■ We have hired John Leonard (no relation) and Brianna Ragsdale as new youth pastors. They will be married July 23 and start in the beginning of August.

■ After two years of praying and asking the Lord, we hired pastors Tony and Roxanna Petersen to begin July 1 as our pastor of discipleship.

There are many key ways a church flourishes in the midst of such multiplication and is able to consider it a blessing. Here a few:

**Living for the glory of God.** We seek after the glory of God. We know that all is for God and for his glory. We live out Romans 11:36: “For everything comes from him and exists by his power and is in-

tended for his glory. All glory to him forever! Amen” (NLT). We focus on God.

**Focusing on the good news of Jesus, the gospel.** We know that the gospel is the death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus died for us and paid the penalty for our sin. There is no hope, no future, no salvation apart from Jesus (John 14:6) and we focus our lives on proclaiming the gospel, for it is the salvation of everyone who believes (Rom. 1:16).

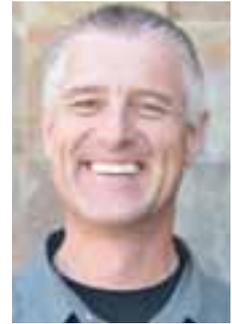
**Living as a house of prayer.** We focus on prayer personally and corporately. Prayer is the most intimate part of our most important love relationship with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We recognize that Jesus is the head of the church, and we are called to get our instructions from him. We are dependent on God to tell us what to do and how to do it, for the church is a house of prayer and his bride.

**Living empowered by the Holy Spirit.** The Holy Spirit empowers us for life and for mission; we don’t have to do it alone (Acts 1:8).

**Living the mission.** Lost people matter to God, for Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, and we are on mission with Jesus (Luke 19:10, John 3:16-17).

**Continually training leaders.** We continue to train leaders, and this allows us to reload our campuses and ministries with gifted young leaders.

**Linking arms with other churches in the city and in our family of churches.** We are unified with churches in our city and with our family of Mennonite Brethren churches. This allows us to do more together than we could ever do alone. Gary Wall, our Pacific District Conference minister, with our PDC Home Mission Board and Don Morris, our USMB national director, with the C2C board have been an encouragement to us and to our young leaders. We can work together, fund projects together and see churches planted together. Denominational family is a gift from God.■



Fred Leonard  
is lead pastor at  
Mountain View  
Community Church,  
Fresno, Calif.

## When the pastor struggles

Supporting your pastor during tough times

I was hired as the pastor of children and family ministries at North Fresno Church (NFC) in March of 2015. I was excited to connect with families, full of energy and equipped for long and unpredictable hours of service. My past work with students provided a breadth of experience and the ability to communicate well. The community agreed that I, a young woman with a love for children and a strong relationship with Jesus, was a great fit for this role.

A great fit except for one reason: I have an unhealthy heart.

During my time at NFC we have prayed and hoped my genetic heart defect would not hinder the work God has called me to. In the first two years of pastoral ministry I taught lessons, participated in activities and still had the gusto to attend students' soccer games and take seminary classes. I believed God was healing my heart to make me a better leader.

Six months ago I began to lose some of my stamina and was feeling lethargic and fatigued. It was getting harder to make it to the office and fulfill my duties at work. I went to my doctor and got the news that I have congestive heart failure. My medication regime had to be modified along with my work schedule. I had to cancel out-of-town trips with my husband as well as meetings with my volunteers. My title as Energetic Leader turned to that of Struggling Pastor.

Your church, like mine, is most likely doing ministry with a Struggling Pastor. Whether that be some-

one navigating mental or physical health issues, an individual working a second job to make ends meet financially or a person trying to mediate family conflict on top of their demanding job, there are people on your leadership team who are having a tough time.

Here are three things you, a member of a church community, can do to assist your Struggling Pastor:

**Be flexible.** Your leaders are going to have “good days” and “bad days”— and they need you to understand that and work with them.

Rescheduled meetings and missed events may come as an inconvenience, but they will allow your leader to get the rest or help they need in that time.

**Have conversation.** The pastors of your church need to carefully and discreetly communicate their personal life. They can more easily share through thoughtful and sincere dialogue as opposed to updates from the pulpit.

**Know that God is still at work.** The Spirit is not hindered by a person's health or family circumstances. While God is not necessarily trying to teach a lesson through these struggles, God will be present through it all. Have faith that your pastor still has a calling to their flock and can continue to shepherd with the help of the Lord and their community.

I am thankful for the children and families in my church who are supporting me this season. May you do the same for your pastor. ■



Caitlin Friesen is a native of Fresno, Calif., and graduate of Fresno Pacific University. She has a passion for Jesus and a heart for kids, both of which have been put to use as a backpacking guide, outdoor educator and camp counselor. She recently married her favorite person in the world, Ben Friesen from Guthrie, Okla. She serves as the associate pastor of children and family ministries at North Fresno Church.

## What's in a name?

Tracing our families' footprints in faith

**W**hen my wife, Hanna, and I found out we were going to have a baby girl, one decision was already made: her name.

Hanna had selected the name Claire for her first daughter years ago. It's a nod to Hanna's favorite song, "Clair de lune," the lullaby-like movement of Claude Debussy's Suite bergamasque.

First name chosen, the next obvious task was selecting a middle. We landed on Elizabeth. It's an elegant compliment to Claire, the three syllables flowing nicely between the two beats of Vogel and her monosyllabic given name.

"Claire Elizabeth" had a touch of class to it and promised to roll off the tongue quickly when we caught her coloring the walls or attempting to ride the cat. There was no deeper meaning than that.

So we thought.

The day after Claire was born, two revelations were made: Claire's great-great-great-grandmother on my mom's side was Elizabeth Klassen Just of Fairview, Okla., and Claire's great-great-great-grandmother on my dad's side was Elizabeth Klaassen Voth of Mountain Lake, Minn.

A middle name that was chosen mostly for vanity instead bestowed upon Claire a heritage stretching down two branches of her family tree.

As inspiring as that discovery was, there's another legacy that I hope Hanna and I leave to her: our witness.

Steve Green recorded a song in the 1980s called "Find Us Faithful." I've performed it several times, and recently the lyrics have become more meaning-

ful to me: "May all who come behind us find us faithful. May the fire of our devotion light their way. May the footprints that we leave lead them to believe, and the lives we live inspire them to obey."

It's one thing to leave a child with the near-tangible gift of their genealogy, but how much more exciting is it to give them a trust and love of Christ that extends deeper than the roots of the family tree?

Hebrews 12:1-2a says, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith."

The phrase "a great cloud of witnesses" creates such an inspiring image for me. Every disciple of Christ going back two centuries has played a role in leading each of us to where we are. And eventually we'll join that host, guiding others into the future.

The last verse of "Find Us Faithful" describes the hope that a child, while sifting through belongings and memories left by a parent, will find the light that leads them down the road to Christ. That verse used to make me think about my parents lining the road for me. But now I see it from the other perspective, watching Claire walk that path.

I pray that Claire will be guided through life by an almost-visible cloud of witnesses made of the memory of the testimonies left by me, Hanna, grandparents, aunts and uncles.

Both Elizabeths will be in there too. ▀



David Vogel serves as the worship director at Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church, where he has been on staff since 2013. He and his wife, Hanna, welcomed their first child, Claire Elizabeth, in January, and live in Hillsboro, where David operates a graphic design studio. David is passionate about using music and multimedia to create an environment of authentic and passionate worship.

## A place to be

Place is an important part of our stories

For me the heart of our new USMB strategic vision is the phrase, “empowering local churches to reach their full ministry potential.” In the Central District Conference (CDC) we currently have 26 *places* in five states (Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska and Minnesota) where we seek to support these churches as they live out our stated core commitments of evangelism, intentional discipleship and leadership development.

We are in the process of formalizing membership with two additional churches who made application to join our district: New Jerusalem Temple in Sioux Falls, SD (Congolese) and Grace International Church in Indianapolis, Ind. (Ethiopian). We continue to have conversations with a network of 14 “orphaned” congregations who left their denomination over theological and policy issues. Furthermore, we have the possibility of having four additional church plants within the next year. Should this all come to fruition, God willing, we would go from 26 *places* to 46. This would add the states of Wisconsin, Iowa and Indiana!

The only way possible to cover this wide-ranging territory is through the networking of USMB, MB Mission, C2C, MB Foundation and our institutions. This year alone we will host two LEAD One events including one in Spanish. We have several churches currently partnering with MB Foundation for building projects. Many pastors are considering or are already enrolled in our new Guidestone retirement plan. As a district we have supported five pastors seeking to further their education (one Bible certificate, three masters and one doctorate). Several of these individuals have also made application for a grant from MB Foundation’s Leadership Generation Fund. Our new partnership with C2C Network will help us to strategically

plant and support existing and future church plants.

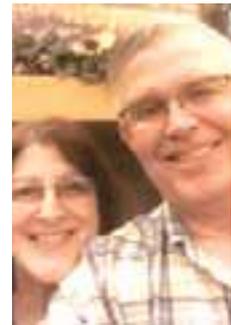
But why is it important for us to focus on strengthening the local church and to welcome others into our fellowship of churches?

In January 2016, after serving three-quarters time as the district minister for four years, we moved to an apartment in Sioux Falls and assumed the full-time position. At the end of our one-year lease, God provided a house for us in nearby Dell Rapids, SD. While the apartment was nice and met our needs, we desired our own *place*.

I have come to believe this yearning for a *place* is part of our created nature and shows up not only in structures like homes and church buildings, but also in *community* in general. It is possible to have a building with no sense of community and to have community without a building. I find it revealing that before God created human beings, he established a first *place* called Eden. It was a perfect *place* to be with God. This first *place* was soon lost when the terms of the agreement were broken and the yearning for a *place* began. From that initial loss of *place*, our history is filled with stories of mankind building and fighting over boundaries, treasures, cities, towers, temples, walls, homes, etc.

But unlike earthly *places*, Christ’s kingdom is not a static kingdom with fixed borders. It is an advancing kingdom empowered by the Christ-promised indwelling of the Holy Spirit. A kingdom open to all who are willing by faith to come through the “narrow gate” of Christ alone. A kingdom renowned by those who were and are compelled by grace to unite in a Christ-like *community/place* as they continue to experience Spirit-led transformation.

Please continue to pray for the CDC as we seek to live into our vision! ■



Rick Eshbaugh serves with his wife, Esther, and represents the CDC on the USMB Board of Faith and Life, Leadership Board and National Strategy Team as well as the Tabor College Board of Directors. Eshbaugh is a 1985 graduate of MB Biblical Seminary, now Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary, and has served as a USMB pastor in Oklahoma, Kansas, Washington, Oregon and North Dakota. He also worked for several years with Church Resource Ministries as part of the national reFocusing team. The Eshbaughs have two daughters, two sons, one daughter-in-law and two grandchildren. This latest move to Dell Rapids, SD, marks their 21st move in 39 years of marriage.

## MILESTONES

### Baptism/Membership

Brian Handy, Haleigh Kramer, Louis Ladenburger and Shannon Vicuna were received May 4 as members of **Laurelglen Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**

Andrew Biehler and Kevin Keo were baptized April 16 and received as members of **Dinuba (Calif.) MB Church**. Debra Collazo and Raquel Keo were also received as members.

Aaron Gerbrandt and MaryJo Swann were baptized April 30 at **Community Bible Church, Olathe, Kan.**

Hank Collins, Hayden Collins, Baya Honorato, Emily Just, Kevin Tos, Alberto Quevas, Brian Lazo and Maria Perez were baptized April 16 at **Reedley (Calif.) MB Church** and received as members April 30. Don Dick, Debbie Estes, Sam Estes and Megan Tos were also received as members.

Darrick Mazour was baptized April 1 at **North Oak Community Church, Hays, Kan.**

Twenty-one people were baptized May 21 at **Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan.** The special service was held at a local camp and was followed by a meal.

Seven people were baptized May 7 at **South Mountain Community Church, Draper, Utah**: Maddy McAfee, Amy Erickson, Cindy Wells, Kipp Myers, Connor Stewart, Robin Quinn and Soheil Shafiee.

Calvin Wiegel was baptized in April at **Axiom Church, Peoria, Ariz.**

Ethan Ratzlaff, Jonas Decker, Sarah Decker and Tanner Greb were baptized April 16 and received as members of **New Hopedale Mennonite Church, Meno, Okla.**

Ronnie Henderson and Viridianna Ramirez were baptized April 30 at **Heritage Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**

Dan O'Marra and Diana O'Marra were baptized recently at **South Mountain Community Church, West Jordan, Utah.**

Mary Ann Lyons, Alyna Eaves, Jessica Maggard, Rylan Maggard, Valerie Hoskins, Angie Mack, Warren Goudreau, Rick Antonelli, Nick Faz and Bryce Statler were baptized April 23 at **South Mountain Community Church, St. George, Utah.**

Jennifer Seals, Gabby Gomez, Cori Lorincz, Grace Honeycutt, Steven Kliewer and Camden Sternberg were baptized April 16 at **Trailhead Church, Littleton, Colo.**

## CELEBRATIONS

**South Mountain Community Church, St. George, Utah**, celebrated one year in their new facility March 25. As part of the celebration, attendees wrote down prayer requests and included them in a time capsule that will be opened on the building's 10-year anniversary.

Attendees of **Reedley (Calif.) MB Church** were invited to write verses of Scripture on the exposed walls of the new office complex Feb. 12. The building project was necessitated by a fire in August.

## WORKERS

Vanessa Guzman, associate pastor at **Garden Park Church, Denver, Colo.**, has resigned.

John Richardson, campus pastor of **Mountain View Community Church (MVCC) Sunny-side, Fresno, Calif.**, is working with the Pacific District Conference Board of Home Missions and C2C Network to launch a new

## Dinuba goes solar



A new solar structure at Dinuba (Calif.) MB Church is proving to be good stewardship, not only environmentally but also financially. Installed in November 2015, the solar system reduces the church's annual electricity bill from about \$27,000 to about \$300. Even after loan payments on the fully-financed, \$184,000 project, the church saves about \$6,000 per year—savings that are expected to increase as California's electric rates increase.

According to Chuck Boldwyn of the church's stewardship team, the fact that the church produces—and is paid for—power during peak weekday hours, then uses power during off-peak weekend hours works to the church's advantage. An added bonus is that the structure, located in the church's parking lot, provides much-desired shaded parking.

Boldwyn suggests that churches considering adding solar power form a task force, ideally including some people with business backgrounds, to investigate options carefully and be sure the move makes good economic sense.

## Pastor plants seeds

For more than 20 years, Hajimu Fujii, pastor of the Japanese Chapel of North Fresno Church and Sacramento Bible Church, broadcasted a 10-minute Saturday morning radio program. "Not many people responded, but in the future I expect other people will reap the harvest," says Fujii. "I sowed the seeds of good news for Japanese-speaking people."

With the conclusion of this ministry in January, Fujii and his wife are looking for direction for "how to live our remaining time." The couple feels God is leading them to work with a group of churches in Sri Lanka that are interested in connecting with the International Community of Mennonite Brethren, the global MB fellowship. Fujii has visited the churches once and is planning another trip in early 2018.

church in Fresno this fall. Ken Wilkinson will transition this summer from youth pastor at the main MVCC campus to Sunnyside campus pastor.

Nathan Ensz will begin serving as lead pastor at **Kingwood Bible Church, Salem, Ore.**, in August.

Erin Oelze is serving as a children's ministry intern this summer at **First MB Church, Wichita, Kan.**

Dan Krause, pastor of **Rosedale Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**, was ordained during the service May 7.

Jeanie Balzer is serving as a summer youth intern at **North Oak Community Church, Hays, Kan.**

Lance Linderman has resigned as director of outreach at **Axiom Church, Peoria, Ariz.**

Joseph Delgado is this year's youth intern at **Heritage Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**

Jared Redding resigned as the pastor of youth and family at **Hesston (Kan.) MB Church**, effective May 26. Jared and his wife, Emma, have partnered with Pioneers International and are currently exploring cross-cultural mission work.

Audrey Hindes was installed July 2 as pastor of **College Community Church MB, Clovis, Calif.**

Sierra Sanchez served as an intern at **Butler MB Church, Fresno, Calif.**, in May and June.

Jon Ahlum has resigned as associate pastor at **Shorelife Community Church, Capitola, Calif.**, effective June 12.

## DEATHS

**Andres, Jacob Henry**, Fresno, Calif., of Bethany Church, Fresno, March 26, 1913—May 13, 2017.

**Camden, Tom**, Fresno, Calif., member of North Fresno (Calif.) Church, Jan. 14, 1954—May 7, 2017. Parents: Pete and Patsy Camden. Spouse: Lisa. Children: Zach, Allison.

**Croissant, Ed "Eddie,"** Reedley, Calif., of North Fresno (Calif.) Church, Dec. 27, 1944—March 24, 2017. Parents: Chris and Rebecca (Wiest) Croissant. Spouse: Loretta, deceased; Marlis. Children: Danielle Van Leeuwen, Todd Croissant, Chris Becker, Courtney Foster; nine grandchildren.

**Hiebert, Raymond G.**, San Jose, Calif., member of Lincoln Glen Church, San Jose, June 9, 1932—Jan. 22, 2017. Parents: Jim and Betty (Claassen) Hiebert. Spouse: JoAnn Nickel Hiebert. Children: John; five grandchildren.

**Hinz, Joyce Darlene**, Corn, Okla., member of Corn MB Church, Sept. 1, 1936—May 28, 2017. Parents: J.J. and Lizzie (Kliewer) Vogt. Spouse: Jim Hinz. Children: Debbie Zahorsky, Jimmie, Terri Weichel; eight grandchildren; nine great-grandchildren.

**Isaac, Roberta Friesen**, Hillsboro, Kan., of Parkview MB Church, Hillsboro, Aug. 4, 1939—May 21, 2017. Parents: Martin and Marie Friesen. Spouse: Alvin Isaac. Children: Lynn Wiebe, Lyle, Lonnie; 11 grandchildren; one great-grandchild.

**Jantzen, Arnold**, Meno, Okla., member of New Hopedale Mennonite Church, Meno, March 30, 1924—Dec. 30, 2016. Parents: William and Katie Jantzen. Spouse: Lavona Jantzen. Children: Gary, Deadra Ediger, Sharon Ediger; 13 grandchildren; 28 great-grandchildren.

**Kopper, Marjorie J.**, Shafter, Calif., member of Shafter MB Church, Nov. 2, 1923—March 31, 2017. Parents: James and Anna (Hilliard) Pickell. Spouse: Ervin Kopper, deceased. Children: Richard, Pamela Parrott, Timothy; eight grandchildren; 17 great-grandchildren.

**Lockie, William "Bill," Jr.**, Fresno, Calif., member of North Fresno (Calif.) Church, Dec. 16, 1930—April 8, 2017. Spouse: Wanda, deceased. Children: William, John, Sam, Julie; three grandchildren.

**Morisse, Randall "Randy" L.**, Grove, Okla., member of Enid (Okla.) MB Church, Oct. 12, 1955—April 21, 2017. Parents: Richard and Barbara (Clemmer)

Morisse. Spouse: Iona Cearley. Children: Jeremy, Ashley, Jacob; three grandchildren; one great-grandchild.

**Morse, Brian**, Fresno, Calif., North Fresno (Calif.) Church, April 2, 1936—April 22, 2017. Parents: George and Margaret Morse. Spouse: Avis Domine. Children: Laurene Cox, Scott, Chris, Stephanie Henry; seven grandchildren.

**Nikkel, Alma Helen**, Shafter, Calif., member of Shafter MB Church, April 14, 1921—May 2, 2017. Parents: John and Susan (Thiessen) Penner. Spouse: Edward Nikkel, deceased. Children: Robert, Donald; four grandchildren; eight great-grandchildren.

**Nikkel, Clarence Wesley**, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, Aug. 23, 1925—May 21, 2017. Parents: Cornelius R. and Matilda (Elrich) Nikkel. Spouse: Doris Kliewer. Children: Stan, Marcia Giumarra, Marion Mulhook; 11 grandchildren; 14 great-grandchildren.

**Nikkel, Norman**, Bakersfield, Calif., member of Rosedale Bible Church, Bakersfield, Dec. 12, 1931—April 29, 2017. Parents: Cornelius R. and Matilda (Elrich) Nikkel. Spouse: Arlene Kliewer, deceased. Children: Cary, Connie Thiesen, Colleen Kiger; 10 grandchildren.

**Richert, Victor D.**, Bakersfield, Calif., of Rosedale Bible Church, Bakersfield, Aug. 4, 1927—May 5, 2017. Parents: John and Justina Richert. Spouse: Geraldine Elrich. Children: Mark, Linda Fox, Lisa Scovill, Todd; eight grandchildren; three great-grandchildren.

**Steinert, Marvin**, Bakersfield, Calif., of Heritage Bible Church, Bakersfield, July 8, 1922—April 22, 2017. Parents: Emanuel and Margaret Steinert. Spouse: Nadine Kruger, deceased. Children: Max, Randy, Gary; six grandchildren; 17 great-grandchildren; one great-great grandchild.

## Lighthouse launches deaf ministry

Lighthouse Church, a church plant in the Denver, Colo., area, launched a deaf ministry called "Seeing the Gospel" on Easter Sunday. In a video announcing the ministry, pastor Josh Shaw says only 2 percent of the 250 million deaf individuals in the U.S. claim a personal relationship with Christ. "We want to be a church that's guiding people back to the love of God, which means we want to guide everyone back, including those in the deaf community," Shaw says in the video.

The church employs American Sign Language interpreters during worship services and produces high-quality videos with translation to post online. In an email to CL, Shaw says gaining attraction for the videos has been relatively easy, but drawing attendees to services has been more difficult. Four deaf people now attend regularly, and he hopes to expand the ministry to at least 10 regular deaf attendees. As the ministry grows, Lighthouse also hopes to offer a small group especially for the deaf.



## REACHING IN

### DISCIPLESHIP

**Buhler (Kan.) MB Church** held a renewal weekend April 22-23, with guest speaker Nasser al'Ahmad, a former Muslim with a dramatic salvation testimony.

A women's conference April 28-29 at **North Fresno (Calif.) Church** tackled "Living Without Fear and Embracing our Identity in Christ."

A group of women from **Rosedale Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**, that gathers during the school year to pray for local schools continues to gather weekly in summer to pray for husbands.

**Neighborhood Church, Fresno, Calif.**, hosted a "Loving our Neighbors" conference May 11. Many area churches were represented at the event, which emphasized practical ways to show Christ's love in the community.

**Hesston (Kan.) MB Church** hosted an evening discussion on women in ministry May 7, with guest speaker Jim Beck, editor of Two Views On Women in Ministry.

**The Rock Community Church, Littleton, Colo.**, hosted an "The Art of Marriage" workshop May 12-13.

**Bible Fellowship Church, Rapid City, SD**, offered an adult Sunday school class on "Expositional Hermeneutics: How to study the Bible" this spring.

**Bible Fellowship Church, Minot, ND**, hosted a 13-week GriefShare class beginning March 12.

**Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church** offered a 10-week class this spring on defending your faith.

**Dinuba (Calif.) MB Church** provided specific outreach ideas before Easter, such as thanking someone for their service in the church or community, doing a "random act of kindness," inviting three friends to Easter services, fasting and encouraging someone with a call or visit.

### FELLOWSHIP

Women decorated tables with their collections or hobbies for a salad supper April 23 at **Parkview MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan.**

A women's night out May 19 at **Bethany Church, Fresno, Calif.**, featured line dancing, including pointers for those new to the activity.

As a way for attendees to get to know one another better, **Vinewood Community Church, Lodi, Calif.**, arranged "Not So Fancy" dinners for up to 11 people on two dates this summer. Participants signed up, then the host contacted them with specifics such as what to bring.

Women from **Mountain View Community Church, Fresno, Calif.**, went hiking May 20.

The Spanish language congregation of **Grace Community Church, Sanger, Calif.**, took a train trip to a dairy in April. In May, a women's group took the same trip.

An "AmazinGrace" 5k run/walk and pancake breakfast May 6 at **The Rock Community Church, Littleton, Colo.**, raised funds for short-term missions.

**South Mountain Community Church, St. George, Utah**, invited women to a day of pampering May 13, with brunch, manicures, pedicures, foot massages, a cooking demonstration, crafting and make-and-take lip balm and lotion bar.

**City Church, Pueblo, Colo.**, hosted a video game tournament May 6.

Every other Saturday evening during the summer, youth pastor Jon Fiester of **Bible Fellowship Church, Rapid City, SD**, takes the youth on a free "destination unknown" activity. Past activities have included drive-in movies, hikes, swimming, mini golfing and other local attractions. The evening always includes food and a devotional. Since parents know the destination, part of the fun is students trying to get parents to "slip up" and tell the secret.

April 30 was the annual church picnic at **Heritage Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**

A women's brunch April 1 at **Buhler (Kan.) MB Church** featured a speaker on the theme, "Bitter or Brave: You Can Choose."

**Dinuba (Calif.) MB Church** wrapped up a sermon series on Hebrews 11 and faith with a movie night featuring "Faith like Potatoes," and a potluck and sharing time. A spring tea for women featured "Teapots with Character."

A fundraiser for a short-term mission team from **Butler MB Church, Fresno, Calif.**, featured a cooking class to learn to make both zwiebach and sticky rice. Students paid a small fee for the lesson and took home a dozen sticky rice or rolls.

An April 23 women's salad supper at **Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church** with the theme "Passing on the Pearls—The Treasures We Pass on to the Next Generation" included a wedding dress style show.

### WORSHIP

**Christ Community Church, Sioux Falls, SD**, held a pancake breakfast and worship in the parking lot June 11. The annual event is called "Parking Lot Praise and Pancake Feed."

Jose Elizondo, former associate district minister for the Pacific District Conference, spoke April 9 in the Spanish language service of **Grace Community Church, Sanger, Calif.** A potluck followed the service.

Internationally-known evangelist Luis Palau was the guest speaker March 26 at **Reedley (Calif.) MB Church**.

## REACHING OUT

### LOCALLY

**Grace Community Church, Sanger, Calif.**, showed appreciation to area teachers at two elementary schools in May by serving them coffee and brownies. The church's children's ministry hosted a community glow-in-the-dark Easter egg hunt April 14, followed by a showing of the movie "Sing."

**Butler MB Church, Fresno, Calif.**, hosted a booth at a "March Against Meth" community outreach event May 20. The event and car show provided a day of free fun and help for a community that is torn by drugs, drop outs and methamphetamines.

A team of youth and leaders from **Heritage Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**, served in Ivanhoe, Calif., over spring break. A team from Heritage also served in Burkina Faso in January 2017.

**North Park Community Church, Eugene, Ore.**, hosted a block party for the community June 17.

Attendance at a Bible-based kids club at an elementary school, made possible by volunteers from **Bible Fellowship Church, Minot, ND**, has increased recently to 32 children. The church calls the increase "an answer to prayer."

Volunteers from **Rosedale Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**, walked the neighborhood and distributed invitations to Easter services in April.

### GLOBALLY

**Reedley (Calif.) MB Church** and **Butler MB Church, Fresno, Calif.**, sent Fresno ACTION teams to Thailand with MB Mission June 21-July 12. The Reedley team included eight people who went to Phan Thong, Thailand, and Butler sent 10 to Chiang Khong, Thailand; both churches support missionaries in the cities in which their ACTION teams served.

**Bethesda MB Church, Huron, SD**, sent a team of youth to Thailand June 7-21. They worked alongside Sandi Fender, an MB Mission worker that the church supports.



# Celebrating OUR DIVERSITY & UNITY



Pastors' Conference  
July 24-26, 2018

National Convention  
July 26-28, 2018

## We all want peace.

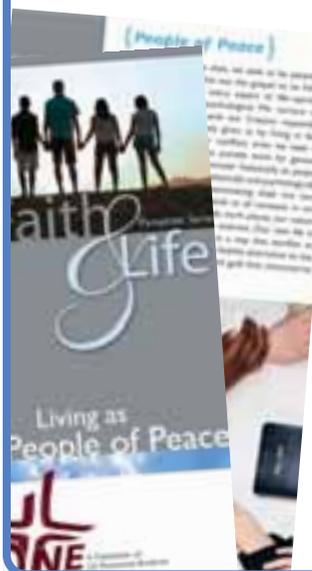
{ Pursuing peace and reconciliation  
is about handling conflict  
appropriately in all areas of life. }

*These resources from the USMB Board of Faith and Life can assist our efforts to be peacemakers in a world layered with racial, political, geopolitical and personal tensions.*

Visit <https://usmb13.com/> to interact with others around the issue of peacemaking.

View the newest BFL pamphlet, Living as People of Peace, at [www.usmb.org/BFLpamphlets](http://www.usmb.org/BFLpamphlets).

Order any brochure in the BFL Pamphlet Series by emailing [offices@usmb.org](mailto:offices@usmb.org) or calling 1-800-257-0515.



**Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif.**, will send a team to Thailand July 24-Aug. 2 to learn and to serve alongside workers there.

**Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church** plans to send teams to Dallas, Texas, and Alaska this summer. The Dallas team will host a sports and activity day camp for kids, and the Alaska team will work on a construction project. Both will work alongside missionaries the church supports.

A men's group from **First MB Church, Wichita, Kan.**, traveled to Pennsylvania in April to facilitate a Men's Encounter weekend at a church there.

### CLEARINGHOUSE

#### Local Church Job Openings

##### Director of Student Ministries/Small Groups:

Enid (Okla.) MB Church is seeking a full-time director of student ministries and small groups. Enid is a town of about 50,000 people, and our current worship attendance averages 280 people. We are looking for a servant leader with a heart for God's work through the local church and a genuine love for people. We desire to find a leader with a passion for student ministry and discipleship through small groups in order to equip both youth and adults to become gospel-shaped people on mission with Christ in the world. For more information, visit [enidmb.com](http://enidmb.com).

**Lead Pastor:** Cornerstone Community Church in Harvey, ND, is seeking a full-time lead pastor. Responsibilities include preaching, teaching and providing leadership to the congregation. Please read through the brief statements of the Mennonite Brethren at [www.usmb.org](http://www.usmb.org) and the NAB's at [www.nabconference.org](http://www.nabconference.org) and if in agreement, submit your resume to [harveycornerstone@gmail.com](mailto:harveycornerstone@gmail.com)

**Lead Pastor:** Dinuba (Calif.) MB Church is looking for the right man to join our congregation and Elder Team as a lead pastor while we prayerfully implement a new vision for transitioning to a refreshed church. With 180 attending two services, we desire to more effectively reach our mostly Hispanic community with the gospel. The successful candidate should have a missional orientation and excitement about embracing this opportunity. For more details email [pastoralsearchtaskforce@gmail.com](mailto:pastoralsearchtaskforce@gmail.com).

#### Ministry Job Openings

**Director:** Good Neighbor Ministries, a nonprofit ministry located in Omaha, Neb., is looking for a candidate to fill the role of director. Responsibilities include organizing work volunteers, managing service projects and building relationships with neighbors, community organizations and churches. Requirements include strong communication and interpersonal skills, some degree of handiness, vision of neighborhood renewal, working closely with the neighborhood church, Faith Bible Church, and relocating to provided housing in the Columbus Park neighborhood. Compensation includes housing, utilities and a monthly stipend of \$1,500 with the freedom to raise personal mission support. Please send resume to [stephen@goodneighbornetwork.net](mailto:stephen@goodneighbornetwork.net). For more information, call Stephen Stout at: (402) 616-1250.

# Connecting improves impact

What is networking and why we need it

Our USMB family has engaged in a new vision, a new path forward. It's a vision that has a significant element as its foundation: networking. I've found that although many people might nod in agreement with that premise, they still may not fully understand what networking is all about.

The Merriam-Webster defines networking as "the exchange of information or services among individuals, groups, or institutions; specifically: the cultivation of productive relationships." In our context networking means churches working together to collectively enhance our ministries. It's about pastors connecting with other pastors to share ideas and for support and accountability. It's also about churches banding together to get more accomplished, such as planting a new church together.

Over the past couple of months USMB has unveiled a new logo. I won't go into all the specifics about the various nuances of meaning within the logo, but the tagline—*Increasing Impact Together*—is important for this article. It speaks about the importance of networking. The impact we have in our communities in the name of Jesus will significantly increase if we don't try to go it alone. As we connect with other MB churches, gleaning ideas, passion and creativity, we'll see our impact increase. We need one another. We're in this together, to see the lasting impact of the gospel in our midst.

Since July 2016 when we announced our new vision, I've realized that simply talking about the value of networking isn't necessarily going to see its fruition. All of us tend to get caught up in our own things. Churches justifiably focus on what's happening in their own sphere of influence. We're busy

people, and networking with others takes time and effort. Without some intentionality, we won't ordinarily make networking a priority, even though it's of great benefit.

So a major aspect of the ministry of USMB will be to encourage, catalyze and provide opportunities for our churches and church leaders to network with one another. We're providing multiple venues for this. Our one day high impact leadership training events, known as LEAD One, provide opportunities for pastors and church leaders to meet with other nearby MB leaders to focus in on specific leadership issues. We'll be presenting a LEAD One in our districts this fall around the topic of race relations. Terry Hunt, pastor of The Life Center in Lenoir, NC, will help lead these fall events.

Another LEAD initiative is called LEAD Cohorts—small groups of six to eight MB leaders who meet online every two weeks over three months or so to learn about and discuss a relevant topic. The feedback we've had so far for this has been outstanding. There will be many more cohorts offered in the future. It's a way for pastors and leaders to engage with others long-distance, as strong relationships are formed that we believe will be long lasting.

We're also planning larger regional events where we provide presenters and resources to help us delve into pertinent issues together. There are certainly many more avenues of networking that will be a part of this new vision moving forward. Networking is the wave of the future for us. I believe that as we come together and serve one another more often and in a variety of ways, we'll see the reality of *Increasing Impact Together*. ▀



Don Morris began serving as the USMB national director Aug. 1, 2016. Prior to accepting this new position, Morris served as the USMB interim executive director for two years and as the director of Mission USA since 2004. He and his wife, Janna, live in Edmond, Okla., where they attend Cross Timbers Church.



# Celebrate 2017! ANCHORING OUR FAITH

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